

# Forest Legacy Project

## Wolfe Creek Forest

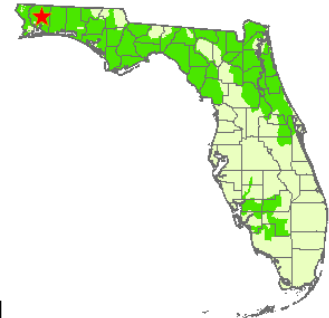
Santa Rosa County, Florida



### FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2021 Forest Legacy Program Funding \$3,750,000  
FY 2021 Non-Federal Cost Share \$1,250,000  
FY 2021 Project Costs \$5,000,000  
FY 2021 Project Acres 1,724

Forest Legacy Funding To Date \$2,788,066  
Total Project Costs \$10,512,408  
Total Project Acres 3,795



★ Project Location  
Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Kingfisher Timber	1,272	\$3,356,080	\$1,781,780	\$1,574,300	Completed 2020
Springhill	799	\$2,156,328	\$1,006,286	\$1,150,042	Completed 2018
Tupelo Timberlands	1,724	\$5,000,000	\$3,750,000	\$1,250,000	Proposed 2021

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

FEE ACQUISITION of the 1,724-acre Tupelo Timberlands tract, named for the onsite trees which contribute to the local honey industry, together with Florida's acquisition of an adjacent 1,903 acres, will fill a gap within the world's largest contiguous longleaf pine landscape. Longleaf pine forests historically extended over 90 million acres, but now total under 5 million. Maintained by regular fire, they are one of the most threatened and ecologically diverse ecosystems in the world, with hundreds of species found nowhere else on earth and multiple federally threatened / endangered species. Restoration will benefit America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative as the #1 conservation priority of the Gulf Coast Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP), and furthers base-buffering goals of NAS Whiting Field, and Florida's Florida Forever program as a designated critical natural resource area. The tract is within the proposed Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape and will connect management units of the Blackwater River State Forest. The tract sits over a shallow aquifer supplying drinking water for most County residents and includes the headwaters of Wolfe Creek draining into a state designated paddling trail and an Outstanding Florida Water.



One of the onsite tupelo-lined ephemeral ponds (Photo by Doug Hattaway)

## PROJECT FEATURES

### Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS - TIMBER:** In 2016, Santa Rosa County forest-related industries infused over \$346 million into the local economy. Tupelo Timberlands will create/retain critical forest-related jobs and develop and expand markets for longleaf lumber, poles and specialty products.
- This tract helps support 1,800 County-level forest-related jobs, including mill workers, loggers, foresters and contractors, in an area whose economy depends heavily on these activities. This tract supplies pine pulpwood with an estimated annual value over \$200,000 to nine local mills.
- The tract's management practices are certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and follow existing forest management plans. The tract contains soils considered superior by the USDA for forestry and agriculture uses, with the largest groups being Dothan, Troup and Fuquay soil types.
- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM NON-TIMBER PRODUCTS:** The tract is providing recreational hunting lands for several local hunt clubs with direct revenue totaling \$22,000/year. Popular game onsite includes deer, turkey and hogs.
- The tract includes several miles of frontage on the spring-fed Wolfe Creek providing clean water into Big Coldwater Creek, a significant tourism destination for outdoor recreation. An adjacent commercial outfitter reports over 40,000 customers a year with an estimated \$7.6M economic impact.
- Strategically, the tract's conservation furthers base buffering efforts of the NAS Whiting Field, the County's largest employer with over 14,600 jobs and a regional economic impact of over \$1 billion.
- **THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT:** The Gopher tortoise (state threatened) and the White-top pitcher plant are documented onsite and both are candidate species for listing with the USFWS Endangered Species database. The newly discovered species, the Bog Dwarf Salamander, is also onsite.
- Families of federally-endangered red-cockaded woodpecker on proximal lands likely use the tract for foraging. Restoration will enable the expansion of nesting and feeding areas for this species. The landowner already plans to restore 200 acres of longleaf pine in Spring 2020.
- The tract is a biodiversity hotspot per Florida Natural Areas Inventory and a Strategic Habitat Conservation Area per Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the federally-threatened Eastern Indigo Snake and federally-endangered red cockaded woodpecker and reticulated salamander.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS, AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** Longleaf pine forests are the most threatened and ecologically diverse ecosystems in the world, with 900 species found nowhere else on earth and 30 federally threatened/endangered species.
- Restoration of the tract will add to the largest contiguous longleaf landscape in the world as part of the Blackwater River State Forest and the on-site ephemeral ponds will be suitable habitat for the federally endangered reticulated salamander.
- Except for its limited wetland habitats, most of the remainder of the 1,724-acre tract will be replanted in longleaf pine.
- **WATER SUPPLY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION:** The tract contains approximately two miles of frontage on both sides of Wolfe Creek, a spring seepage fed creek flowing into Big Coldwater Creek, a designated paddling trail by Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails.
- A shallow sand and gravel aquifer under the tract supplies drinking water to 90% of the County's population, about 156,000 people. The Northwest Florida Water Management District water resource plan notes drinking water resources are inadequate, highlighting the need to protect the aquifer.



Restoration of longleaf pine and sandhill natural community  
(Photo by Doug Hattaway)

- The flatwood forest wetlands of Wolfe Creek and Big Coldwater Creek flow into Blackwater River, an Outstanding Florida Water, and in turn flows into the Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve. The Blackwater River and Yellow River Marsh are critical habitat for the federally endangered Gulf Sturgeon.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** The tract's acquisition will offer a connection through public conservation lands between the existing Blackwater Heritage Trail from Milton to the NAS Whiting Field and the internal trail system with the Blackwater River State Forest (BRSF).
- The tract will be incorporated into the BRSF with the opportunity to offer numerous public recreation activities such as fishing, hiking, paddling, hunting, wildlife viewing and horseback riding. In 2018, the BRSF hosted 737,428 visitors.
- A portion of the tract fronts the riparian hardwood forest wetlands of Big Coldwater Creek - a state-designated paddling trail and is the headwater to the Wolfe Creek.
- **SCENIC:** The tract protects superior vistas in the Wolfe Creek Basin, including overlooks of Wolfe Creek as it winds toward an adjacent downstream unit of Blackwater River State Forest and overlooks along the State-designated paddling trail on Big Coldwater Creek.
- **HISTORIC/CULTURAL/TRIBAL:** The tract historically and currently supports a robust timber industry. The region's modern history is centered around the industry, including the County seat's name of Milton (Mill Town). There is one documented historical site in the State Master Site File.

## Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** Santa Rosa County is in the top 10% of counties nationally for its population growth rate of over 15% for the period 2010-2018. This growth places immense pressure to develop land.
- This tract's zoning allows subdivision, residential and commercial development, agriculture, recreational hunting and conservation uses. Most of the tract is zoned AG, which allows one dwelling unit per acre and a smaller portion is zoned AG-2, which allows 1 dwelling unit per 15 acres.
- According to the Santa Rosa County Extension Office, at least 4,000 acres of timberland in northern Santa Rosa County has been converted to farmland over the past two to three years.
- **LAND AND LANDOWNERS CIRCUMSTANCES:** The current owner and the previous owner of the tract sold off about 150 acres targeted for conservation land for residential and commercial development for profit because the natural creek frontage and natural habitat is a desired feature for both uses.
- The current owner is a timber investment management company whose business model is to buy timberlands that the market demonstrates has development pressure for larger returns on investment. This owner is motivated by its business model to sell lands for development.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** NAS Whiting Field is the busiest air station in the world with flight training activity increased following the last Base Realignment and Closure.
- The County leads the U.S. in dryland per-acre cotton yields and is second in total peanut acreage and production, first in average yields per acre and in crop quality and first with 135,000 acres of Class I farmland making the forest's conversion to agriculture a real and serious threat.
- The Santa Rosa County population grew 44.8 percent between 2000 and 2016, from 117,743 to 170,497 (U.S. Census Bureau) and is projected to increase by 1.9% annually through 2025.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** Electric connections are available and the tract recharges the underlying aquifer that can support rural development and cash crop farming if converted.
- Gentle slopes of 1-5% with well drained soils, low density residential and considerable frontage on



Wolfe Creek (Photo by Doug Hattaway)



paved public rights-of-way make development inexpensive and attractive to buyers.

## Strategic

- **CONSERVATION STRATEGY:** GCPEP identifies Wolfe Creek Forest, including this tract, as its #1 conservation priority to reestablish longleaf habitat. This tract furthers Longleaf Alliance's Longleaf Restoration Initiative and Significant Landscapes for Longleaf Pine Conservation, which support restored landscapes of over 100,000 acres.
- This tract's conservation will add to the largest contiguous longleaf landscape in the world, which includes Eglin Air Force Base, Blackwater River State Forest and Conecuh National Forest.
- This tract's conservation supports Florida Forest Service 2010 Statewide Forest Action Plan by addressing several issues of importance to the state including: supporting sustainable forest markets, reduce further fragmentation of longleaf pine ecosystems, meeting the challenges of climate change, improving the economic viability of forests, and protecting water quality and quantity.
- The Florida Office of Greenways and Trails identifies Big Coldwater Creek as a state-designated paddling trail and an overland segment through the tract will offer a preferred alternate route from the Blackwater State Forest Trail Corridor and the Blackwater Heritage State Trail and Blackwater Multi-Use Trail.
- NAS Whiting Field identifies the property within its area of concern for potential land use conflicts, with the intent to add the entirety of the property. Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative funding is available for the acquisition of property interests, which is eligible as non-federal cost share.
- The project area is within one of the 16 Significant Geographic Areas of Longleaf Alliance Longleaf Pine Range-Wide Conservation Plan and part of the Longleaf Alliance's America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative.
- The USDA Farm Service Agency designated the area within which the tract lies as a National Conservation Priority Area and is enrolling land in the region in the Conservation Reserve Program to incentivize longleaf restoration in support of the Florida Forest Service Assessment of Need priority for restoration of longleaf forest habitat crucial to threatened and endangered species.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** The Florida Department of Environmental Protection identifies the larger Wolfe Creek Forest, of which this tract is a part, as a Florida Forever priority for its natural resources and habitats, and its role as a landscape connection between existing conservation lands totaling over 800,000 acres including Eglin Air Force Base, Whiting Field and Conecuh National Forest.
- The project would link publicly owned conservation lands on the north and south sides of the property and offer superior connections to two existing recreation trails: Blackwater Heritage Trail and Blackwater Multi-Use Trail supporting biking and hiking uses.
- NAS Whiting Field has supported protection of lands surrounding the base through the acquisition of conservation easements precluding incompatible development and assuring conservation of natural resources.



Pitcher Plant (Photo by Florida Forest Service Biologist)

## Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
<b>Readiness Total Tally Score</b>	<b>6</b>

## Supporting Parties

Trust for Public Land; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Santa Rosa County; Naval Air Station Whiting Field; Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; and Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

**For more information on the Forest Legacy Program, please contact:**

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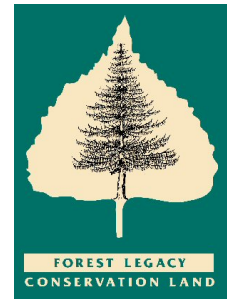
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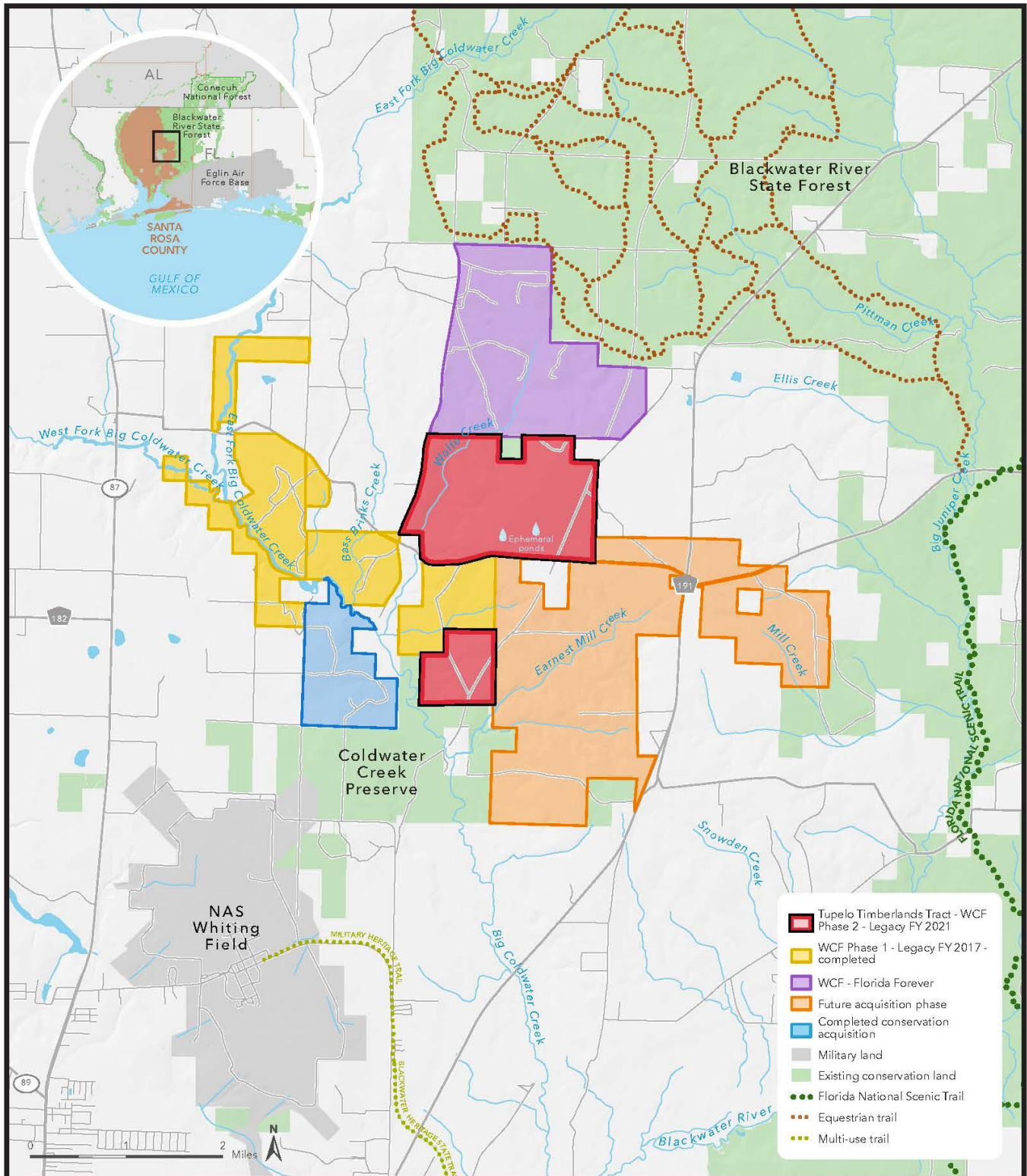
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# Tupelo Timberlands Tract

## WOLFE CREEK FOREST

### FY 2021 FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM PROPOSAL

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